

# Devotional Blog

## April 12<sup>th</sup> Easter Sunday

One of the effects of Lockdown may mean that you don't have an Easter Egg to tuck into on Easter Sunday. When you do get one no doubt it will taste even sweeter because of the wait! Easter Eggs remain a tasty, simple and effective symbol of new life on one of the most important dates in the Church calendar. Christianity, of course, has many different symbols from fish to shells to the Apostle Peter's cross-keys of Heaven. Even the Gospels have their own motifs: a winged man (Matthew), a winged lion (Mark), a winged ox (Luke) and an eagle (John). Obviously, by far the most well known and the most extensively used symbol is the Cross. Yet another powerful visual metaphor shines out from the heart of the Easter story: the empty tomb. Granted, it would not work as well as a pendant compared with a cross but its meaning to believers could not be more significant. The empty tomb tells the world that Jesus has defeated death by his sacrifice for us. So, let's think about that amazing first Easter morning: the stone has been rolled back, the body has .... gone. Let's reflect on the meaning of the empty tomb by considering three people who make up the story of that glorious morning: a key woman. An unnamed sinister group and finally the owner of the missing body.

The Gospels differ slightly in who went to the tomb early that day, but they are clear that they were all women! One name stands out- Mary Magdalene. She hails from Magdala, a fishing village on the north-west shore of Lake Galilee. Luke identifies her as the woman from whom Jesus casts out seven demons, as one of the women who followed Jesus and as one of the women who provided the material support for Jesus's ministry. There are many myths and legends about Mary Magdalene: that she was a reformed prostitute (often depicted in art with long loose hair and bare breasts); that she was the woman who anointed Jesus' feet and dried them with her hair; that she was Jesus' lover; that she was Jesus' wife and mother of his children. The thing is, none of these myths are supported by the New Testament. In the early church she had a posh Latin name "apostola apostolorum" – the Apostle to the Apostles. Sadly, by the sixth century male church leaders had changed her image to that of the penitent prostitute. Yet, there is no doubt that she is the first Apostle, who is told by Jesus to "Go and tell the others". She is the first preacher of the Gospel Good News and the first person (John 20: 1-10) that Jesus led from grief to faith and then rushes to tell the disciples (and us); "I have seen the Lord!"

The second people who crop up in the story of the empty tomb are a group that is not actually named. Mary talks about them: "THEY have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where THEY have laid him". Who are these "they" people? Are "they" grave robbers? Are "they" the Jewish authorities? Are "they" the Roman authorities? "They" are the faceless, impersonal powers at work. We talk

about them today. “they” have closed the road; “they” are cracking down on crime; “they” want to close the hospital. It was “they” at work at Jesus’ trial and death, stirring up public opposition.

At the opposite extreme, is our third player in the drama, he is someone else who is very much present at the tomb but only in his physical absence for most of the story. This is Jesus. He is gloriously free of the grave! Unlike Lazarus who appears from his tomb still wrapped in his grave clothes, Jesus’ wrappings are neatly rolled up. This is the regal Jesus, in total command of the “they”. “They can’t consign him to a tomb; “they” will not constrain him with grave wrappings; “they” will not prevent him rising from the dead. Jesus on that first Easter morning defies the “they”, and that is an ongoing task for us. “They” tell us that God is supposed to be a delusion. ” They” tell us that the church has had its day and is finished. “They” tell us that science has replaced religion and faith, or so “they “say.

But Brothers and Sisters, as we celebrate and rejoice in Christ’s victory over death, we recall once again the defiance to the “they” as we reflect on the Risen King Jesus. God has reached out to save the lost and through the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection Jesus has reconciled the world to God. The empty tomb is a symbol of the promise to all believers that death is not the end, it is a doorway.

In the children’s Veggie Tales series is a charming story called “An Easter Carol”, at the end of the story a fairy called Hope sings the following Words: “God has made a way for all

who mourn and grieve. Death will never be the end if you just believe. There is nothing left to fear, nothing Heaven knows. For He died for us to give us life and to give us hope he rose”

Enjoy your (belated) Easter Egg. Enjoy new life for Christ is Risen. Hallelujah, he is Risen indeed.

Mark Gilks

Hampton Mission Partnership